GRANDPA GETS HIS CALL-UP

by

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It all happened the day before Grandpa Collins' seventy-ninth birthday party.

On a bright September morning he was puttering about the garden soaking up the hot sunshine when Jed Wilkins, the station master, came up the path.

"Morning, Grandpa," he said cheerily.

Charlie Collins was grandpa to practically all of Centreville.

"Morning, Jed." replied Grandpa, leaning on his rake. "What's on your mind?"

"What makes you think I've anything on my mind?" asked Jed.

"Well," explained Grandpa, " a man as busy as you are these days just don't stroll about passing the time of day with folks for the pleasure of it. Must be pretty rushed since young Sims joined the Navy. Leaves you without any help, doesn't it?"

"And that's just what brings me here," interrupted Jed, "Grandpa, you're the only man in this town that's been able to retire, ain't you, and reading the paper last night about the Manpower Shortage gave me an idea. It says that even old people and retired people are working again and right away I sees the answer to my problem. Get Grandpa Collins in at nights, I thinks, and I'll be able to catch up a mite on things. So I hurries over to ask you before anyone else gets the same brain-wave. How does that suit you?"

"Well," said Grandpa, slowly, "I'll have to think about it, Jed, I'll have to think about it. Tell you what I'll do. Sarah's in there right now," indicating the house, "getting ready for my birthday party tomorrow. I'll talk it over with her and let you know, say, day after tomorrow? Can't spoil this party, you know! How'll that suit you?"

Jed said it would have to do, he guessed, but not to think about it too long and took his departure as Grandpa turned to his digging.

He was hardly out of sight before podgy, little Mr. Banks, the town's one and only druggist bustled up the path.

"Say, Grandpa," he called, "how'd you like to earn some pin money?"

Grandpa turned slowly.

'I've been nearly crazy since my boy joined the Air Force," he explained, "and now my daughter Nelly's joined the Women's Army and I'm stuck. That editorial in yesterday's Bulletin just whispered Grandpa Collins to me and over I've come first thing to ask you to lend me a hand, say Wednesday mornings and all day Saturday. Your patriotic duty, you know," he boomed.

Evidently Centreville's business men were avid readers of their newspaper for by nightfall Grandpa had been interviewed or telephoned by all of them, all solicitating his help to solve their individual manpower problem.

The School Trustees had gently suggested that he might like to make a little money tending the school furnace for the winter, or if such work was too demanding on an old man's back, he could instruct in history and geography and - hadn't he been a hockey player of note sixty years ago? Well, the school team could use a good coach!

The inspector of telephones had called long distance and gravely insisted it was his duty as a patriotic citizen to run the local switchboard from midnight to dawn and offered him a bed in the exchange building.

Joe Price, general store and implement man, informed him caustically that he was the only male in Centreville with an intimate knowledge of the vagaries of the horse and it was absolutely imperative he give Joe the first option on his services.

The town's handy-man, Bill Skinner, undertaker, photographer, engraver, and what have you, put in a claim and even Bob, the son who had inherited the Centreville Bulletin, built through the untiring efforts of Grandpa Collins over a period of forty years, seemed hurt when his father gently, but firmly, declined to cooperate.

"No, Son," said Grandpa, "I got to think it over. I got to give each and every one of you a square deal. When I've decided which job I should take to best further the War Effort, I'll let you know."

All that night Grandpa lay tossing and twisting as he wrestled with his problem. Finally, as dawn was brightening his room, he could stand it no longer, so he decided to take Grandma into his confidence.

"Land sakes!" Grandma reproached him, when he had finally managed to wake her, "Don't expect me to be very bright at this hour of the morning but go ahead."

So he explained to her all about the offers and his difficulty in knowing which one he should take.

"It's like this, Sarah," he explained, " you might say I got my call-up, just like the rest of the boys. The only trouble is I didn't get one call, I got half a dozen or more. The dang question that's bothering me is - which is the right one? If I take Jed's offer, I make old man Banks sore, if I please Banks, I offend Joe, if I take Joe up, the School Trustees and the Telephone Company are going to be nasty: and I'm too near to being buried to rile that old goat, Bill Skinner. If I give Bob a hand the whole town'll think I'm favoring my own family and I can't keep my finger out of the newspaper pie and the Lord knows what else. Honest Sarah, I'm plumb wore out thinking about it. I just ain't got the strength to tote ashes on my back, or chase a puck around a hockey rink, or toss mail bags on the milk train. Yet I can't get out of it, not when it's my patriotic duty."

"Patriotic fiddlesticks!" snapped Grandma, "Well Charlie, I don't know what to say. 'Trust in the Lord' is a mighty handy proverb. Meantime, it's your birthday, so let's forget about it for today. Many happy returns."

Grandpa did his best to enjoy the celebration but the worry nagged at the back of his mind continually. Sarah was mysterious about a trip to town. She did not mention the visit to the telegraph office but she did manage to produce the birthday dinner o time.

When Grandpa finally sat down to a table overflowing with good things to eat, surrounded by his children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces, he almost forgot his troubles. But the appearance of Jed Wilkins at the door brought it back with renewed vigor. However, this time Jed merely wished him happy birthday, handed him a telegram, and departed. The old man opened it, read the contents and then a beautiful smile slowly spread across his leathery cheeks.

"It's from my old partner, Jim Bennett," he announced to the assembled guests, " you remember him, Sarah?"

Sarah smiled back.

"Jim was a great one for the politicians," explained Grandpa, " and now it's paying dividends. A pretty nice job with the Selective Service Board. Good old Jim."

"What's the telegram say, dad?" asked Bob.

"I was waiting for some one to say that. Can't understand why your curiosity ain't got the better of you, Sarah. Jim wants me to come down to Ottawa with him. Says he's got a nice place for me there and I'm the only one that can fill the bill. Guess it's my patriotic duty to go, eh Sarah? Well, what's everybody waiting for? Let's eat."

Grandma's eyes twinkled merrily.